

February 23, 2023

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee,

Greetings members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Dalma A. I am 25 years old and I am writing in support of increasing the State's Homeless Youth Line Item. I recently received services from The Connection's Start Program, which is funded through line item.

I became homeless when I was 23 years old on the east side of Bridgeport CT. At that time in my life, I was making a lot of bad choices involving drugs, unhealthy relationships, poor budgeting, and had need for mental health support. I experienced a lot of obstacles without the resources that I needed. As a woman, it was so difficult being homeless. I wasn't able to take care of my hygiene needs and I had very little funds to buy food, water or clothing. I couldn't pay for a place to stay. The amount of stress and the emotions that I experienced put me in a place I didn't want to be in mentally and emotionally. Homelessness is more than just not having a place to stay, it's a chain reaction. I lost so much. Not just physical things but even my peace of mind. I lost and gained a lot as I saw life in a beautiful way and also in an ugly way while being homeless. Through all of the things that I have been through, I can say, I am grateful because I would not have seen or experienced so much in my life. I have met so many great people and have had good opportunities for growth. I knew that it was my choices that landed me in the situation I was in, but I wanted to do better. Even though I wanted better for myself, I knew I couldn't do it by myself.

When The Connection program found me they gave me something I didn't have in a long time. That was hope. They really made a difference in my life and have taught me so much. And the people there are so amazing and supportive. They make you feel like you matter in this world. They tell me they will help me better myself, but I have to want it. They want me to be successful, but not for the benefit of the program, but for myself. The Connection is a big part of my life with all of the emotional and financial support they have provided me with. I am grateful they connected with me and brought out a better version of myself. I was able to get an apartment and I have been maintaining income steadily for the past year. I got back on my feet, and the reality is that their name reflects who they are in real life because they connected me with so much. They push me in the

direction I need to head in so that I can do what I need to do to get out of my situation. Because of that, I can look forward to a better future.

While the Governor's proposed budget didn't make any cuts to the Homeless Youth line item, it also didn't increase funding for this line item that serves some of our most vulnerable homeless people. This funding in the state budget has helped me and a bunch of other struggling young people a lot. But there are so many more young people in our state who are currently in the position that I was in, nowhere to go, and no opportunities to get unstuck.

I appreciate that this committee has consistently protected and increased the funds that make these programs possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Dalma A. (Bridgeport, CT)